

CENTESSIMUS ANUS, POVERTY AND UNIVERSITY

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When in our continent, 44% of population lives under poverty line, and 19% under extreme poverty; and in my country with more than 100 million people, 13 millions survive with an income of \$1.6 dollars per day, and 47 million Mexicans do not earn \$4.5 daily; poverty should not be considered only as an academic curiosity, and becomes at social priority. That about 'human rights for everyone' is not quite simple. People does not want only be living, but living in the way that they consider as worthy. And worthy lives are linked to human rights issues.

I. Three ways to understand poverty: wellbeing, capacities and cultural uprooted.

To be poor is to lack of economic, social and cultural goods that makes somebody able to live as human being. It is lack of pounds of meal, gallons of milk, years at school, amount of money, etc., that is necessary to live in a dignity way according to each country. In economic term, poverty is determinate by the lack of means necessary to reach the goods that allow reach the life that is consider worthy according to human being biology and cultural necessities. In this way, poverty is lack of wellbeing or lack of those goods.

But people do not want the goods by itself; people do not want the milk by itself. People need to transform the meals into wealth, the educational goods into a life style, the amount of money into the things that their consider as worthy. If someone wants to transform the goods in worthy realization, he or she need convert those goods throughout personal abilities and opportunities of access. Amartya Sen call this abilities and opportunities as 'Capacities'. This is a second level of poverty.

But *Centessimus Annus* understand poverty not only as lack of wellbeing or lack of Capacities. But before talking about poverty, John Paul II recognize that the person work is the authentic motor of the creation of wealth, because it implies innumerable human abilities and social interrelation in order for “organizing such a productive effort, planning its duration in time, making sure that it corresponds in a positive way to the demands which it must satisfy, and taking the necessary risks (*Centesimus Annus*, 32)”

In addition, the deceased pope said that “A business cannot be considered only as a "society of capital goods"; it is also a "society of persons" in which people participate in different ways and with specific responsibilities, whether they supply the necessary capital for the company's activities or take part in such activities through their labour (*Centesimus Annus*, 43).”

We found here the idea of “Person and Action” about personal action and communities. The economy activity, the market and business are not only a blind force directed by a fatalist fate: market are a community of people, in consequence, it has its roots and its ends in persons and their dignity.

For that reason, person ought to act in economy as like they are, as human being that not suffer or ‘happened’ economic and productive events, but beings that assume the decision and the responsibility of the economic interrelation of goods and people. For example, in *Laborem Excersens*, talking about labor dignity, John Paul II wrote: “Every effort must be made to ensure that in this kind of system also the human person can preserve his awareness of working "for himself". If this is not done, incalculable damage is inevitably done throughout the economic process, not only economic damage but first and foremost damage to man (*Laborem Excersens*, n. 15)”

Let us return to *Centesimus Annus* and its view of poverty. “The fact is that many people, perhaps the majority today, do not have the means which would enable

them to take their place in an effective and humanly dignified way within a productive system in which work is truly central. They have no possibility of acquiring the basic knowledge which would enable them to express their creativity and develop their potential. They have no way of entering the network of knowledge and intercommunication which would enable them to see their qualities appreciated and utilized. Thus, if not actually exploited, they are to a great extent marginalized; economic development takes place over their heads, so to speak... (*Centesimus Annus*, n. 33).”

If we notice, John Paul II understand poverty not only as lack of goods or lack of capacities; but he made the point that poverty is also the impossibility of be a part as effective persons with dignity, in a community of people, in wich their capacities, abilities and their personal being may be needed, appreciated and taken advantage of. When somebody is incapable of contribute in a community, is incapable to express, to realize, to discover, to recognize and to have conscience about his or her dignity in order to face his or her vocation toward God, the world, the others and himself or herself. To be poor is to be cultural or community uprooted.

Centesimus Annus recognize that looks like the market is the more efficient way to take advantage of the environment resources and the best way to distribute it to all human beings. But also say, that market has limits. Something is wrong when someone are expelled from the market rules –because his lack of knowledge, lack of social interrelation or lack of capital-, and all goods are acquired by this system, and for that reason somebody can not fulfill his or her basic human requirements. Poverty is also lack of basic goods and lacks of fulfill the minimum human standards. For that reason, poverty is outcast or indigence referring to wellbeing, capacities and communities and culture.

John Paul II said it in this way: “But there are many human needs which find no place on the market. It is a strict duty of justice and truth not to allow fundamental

human needs to remain unsatisfied, and not to allow those burdened by such needs to perish. It is also necessary to help these needy people to acquire expertise, to enter the circle of exchange, and to develop their skills in order to make the best use of their capacities and resources. Even prior to the logic of a fair exchange of goods and the forms of justice appropriate to it, there exists *something which is due to man because he is man*, by reason of his lofty dignity. Inseparable from that required "something" is the possibility to survive and, at the same time, to make an active contribution to the common good of humanity. (Juan Pablo II, *Centesimus Annus*: n. 34)"

In resume, the market and its rules do not are enough by itself for understand poverty and economy. For that reason, the poverty solutions, should be directed to satisfy the minimum of wellbeing, to realize the capacities, and ingrain people in communities in which their can contribute and discover their dignity, because he or she is taking in count in the grow of common good.

II. And, what is the role of the University?

I should recognize that I do not know many things about American Universities. I'll talk about Mexican Universities, specifically in private and catholic inspired university, like mine. I know that many of these idea could be 'exported' to other type of university.

The University generates knowledge and worthy solutions for social problems. Not only describes what poverty is or what kind of roads can create wealthy in economics or not only promotes solidarity. One of the first lessons of *Centesimus Annus* is that if we want generate any kind of efficient solution against poverty, we should understand it in three levels: lack of wellbeing, lack of capacities and to be cultural or community uprooted.

For the first level of understanding poverty, the University usually has less problems: ordinarily educate its students in order to be a part of market and function correctly in productive system; and teach them how making the recourses more efficient, how discover necessities of others, how increase the productivity, how creates business and jobs.

For the second level of understanding poverty, lack of capacities, University has an extraordinary field of action in the creation of new ways of access to the goods that allow be a part of economic system. In other words, University transmit and generate new ways to “give fishes” and “to teach how to fish”. But University goes beyond, it generates more ways “to generate fishing rods” and “fair access to the lake”. Heidi Hunruh had grouped in two axis this generation of solutions against poverty: i) person and community; and, ii) directed and undirected help. With this axis we can generate four fields to create wealth and built capacities to distribute it: i) giving goods to singular person, ii) giving goods to a community, iii) create abilities and access to a singular person, and iv) create abilities and access to a community.

In some cases, private universities focus its educational effort about poverty encouraging the generosity of their students, throughout donations, associations of charity, etc.. That in some cases promote a solidarity exclusively rooted on the generosity sacrifice of personal time or money. That kind of activities are very important, but not are the exclusive role of the role of University against poverty.

University has a privilege place to generate and create, for example, new models of business and companies, in which person and her capacity of be related with others, shall be the axis of the business, because the company became a community of people and goals in a worthy interrelation of economics, ethics and cultural goods. If we reduce the education about poverty, only to “charitable activities”, that follow the logic of sacrifice of time and money, we are in a very

high risk to reduce poor people to a mean of generate good feelings in me, as a kind of “conscience window cleaner”.

Poverty implies the need of giving others certain kind of goods; but also create in poor people the abilities and access to convert those goods in a worthy life; but also implies the generation of cultural roots.

I suggest that education in University about poverty implies:

1. Creation of communities, because it is the place in which person can discover, express and realize his role as worthy somebody.

2. *Dignity mirrors*. People need some models in which they can discover his dignity in a very specific way of action. For example, in an extreme poor indigenous community in which I used to work; during five years they built a church with solid materials. The magnitude of the church compared with the quality and dimension of their little houses, could sound a foolish construction to a tourist. But when a indigenous left his house every morning and look that building, he can realize that he is able to beat his own poverty in order to give something big, important and worthy to somebody important and worthy. It allows poor people understand their lives as a part of an important and worthy history. That church works as *dignity mirror*, because it show to indigenous, that poverty that ‘happened’ to him do not has the last word and can be beaten in certain way.

3. The education against poverty, should include the acquisition of capacities and goods that allow poor people live in a worthy way. In other words, make that everybody can reach a minimum standard of living because everybody can play under the market rules; a market which ought be understood as a community of people, and a way to develop goods and services, in which the dignity of person is the starting point.

Related with my last suggestion, I should make a precision. The market is not by itself a rule to measure a worthy human community: the work of person, the basic goods that a person need, the society, can't be reduced to the market rules and to the blind fate of economic rules.

5. In private universities, the students usually can not be considered as a poor. For that reason, we should educated them avoiding a reduction of poor people as a mere part of production mechanism, unit of production, object of government administration or producer of good feelings.

III. Conclusion.

When *Rerum Novarum* was published in late XIX century, Catholics in Mexico, generate groups of study in order to know the papal document. From those groups, political parties were founded, as president Fox's party; companies with Christian roots, as Bimbo; business schools as the top ranked business school in Latin-America, as IPADE, my university's business school, etc. I'm sure that *Centesimus Annus* will repeat the experience. University will make it possible.